



ADA COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF
PARKS & WATERWAYS

4049 Eckert Road
Boise, Idaho 83716-884
Phone (208) 577-4575
Fax (208) 577-4579

STATEMENT REGARDING BARBER PARK AIR STATIONS

June 17, 2021

Thank you for your interest regarding the Barber Park air stations. Considering some of the inquiries we have received, this statement serves to elaborate on the circumstances that resulted in the retirement of the air stations by Ada County Parks & Waterways.

We understand that for some, no amount of explanation will “fill your empty tube” so to speak. However, we hope this statement sheds some light on the realized benefits that are achieved by more efficient park management in the face of tremendous growth and change in our community.

Barber Park is a regional park open to the public year-round and it has always been in our best interest to create the most enjoyable experience for all park visitors while maximizing efficiencies related to the float season. Our staff takes immense pride in our public duties and responsibilities and we feel confident that we have consistently met all challenges that have come with operating, managing, and maintaining the county’s flagship park and associated amenities during the annual Boise River float season.

For the first time in recent memory, during the entirety of the 2020 float season the air stations were not available and park visitors adapted quickly. In addition to several of the observed operational benefits and unexpected lessons learned by all Barber Park staff during the 2020 season as a result of this change, the daily average number of vehicles entering Barber Park also increased by 28% over 2019 (from 402 to 516 daily) shattering the previous daily average record. For staff this came as somewhat of a surprise because despite this historically high visitation, management of all Barber Park float season operations ran more smoothly and efficiently than ever. It was a distinct and noticeable positive change for the majority of park visitors, and it was an epiphany for Barber Park leadership and staff.

While the population boom coupled with a general increase in visitation played a role, this 28% daily average increase in vehicles can also be attributed, in part, to the elimination of the bottleneck of humanity that would formerly block two of the three designated access points to the river at the Barber Park beach air stations. In prior years when park staff turned on the noisy garage compressor and the air stations were running it would essentially encourage pumppless floaters all day to queue up in one of several long lines for up to 45 minutes to inflate their equipment. During 2020, instead of a crowded pile-up of people on the hot, shadeless beach

during the busiest days of summer, visitors were spread throughout the many shady, grassy areas of Barber Park with their own rafts, tubes, and pumps quickly and efficiently inflating their own equipment prior to launch. As Barber Park staff continued to observe, evaluate, discuss, and document this new phenomenon and the benefits it achieved each day for 61 straight days of the 2020 float season, it became clear that Barber Park no longer operates as efficiently during the float season with air stations. Despite the minor inconvenience for some, the overall experience for most improved significantly.

At this point it should also be noted that anytime multiple air hoses were being used concurrently (as was typically the case), the air flow to each hose would decrease and create even longer inflation delays at the beach. These delays at the beach would have a compounding effect throughout Barber Park, including clogging up the limited parking areas for a much longer duration than necessary. Now this might not have been a big problem 10, 15, or 20 years ago when there were far fewer Ada County residents, Barber Park visitors, and Boise River floaters...but times have changed and for several years now we have been changing with them.

Almost every action that Ada County Parks & Waterways and our contractors have taken over the past eight years related to Barber Park construction, remodeling, technology, operations, grounds maintenance, staffing, line management, safety, parking support, outreach, floater guides, interagency coordination, equipment inventory, shuttle volume/scheduling, signage, vehicle procurement, and removal of air stations has been implemented to more efficiently facilitate the flow of vehicles and people through Barber Park and down the beautiful Boise River during the annual float season. Each year we strive to learn something new and use our experience to incorporate changes as necessary to make the next season even better than the last.

Other realized benefits and/or reported observations from elimination of the Barber Park air stations in 2020 include:

- No obstructions to the ADA access ramp and the public restrooms at the Beach House by people and their floating devices waiting in air station lines
- Near elimination of reported fights, altercations, smoking, alcohol consumption, explicit language, glass, cigarette butts, and crowding at the floater launch area
- No daily, persistent loud and noisy compressors and leaky air hoses disturbing visitors (and animals) at the beach and launch area
- Encouragement of floater self-sufficiency and safety by recommending hand pumps be carried downriver in the event of any unplanned vessel deflation
- Reduction in the volume of deflated tubes littering the Boise River stream bank
- Elimination of staff time and expenses related to the maintenance and repair of compressor, tubes, valves and nozzles
- Energy savings resulting from no longer requiring power for daily compressor operation 9 hours a day all summer long

Lastly, we are extremely excited to welcome all 2021 visitors to the new Barber Park Plaza! Improvements include larger grass gathering areas, new and realigned concrete pathways, picnic pads, seatwall benches, and a new floater launch ramp. Since opening less than a week ago, public feedback, visitor flow, and interaction have all been tremendous and we're looking forward to putting these new improvements to the test throughout the remaining 82 days of the official Boise River Float Season.

Thanks again to all county residents, park visitors, and river floaters for your cooperation and understanding as we continue to learn and adapt to meet the needs of our growing and "new" community.

Sincerely,

The Ada County Parks & Waterways Department